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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [AF](#) [DA](#)

SUBJECT: ANTI-CARTOON DEMONSTRATIONS WIDESPREAD, BUT SMALL

[11.](#) (SBU) SUMMARY. The publication of cartoons in Denmark and across Europe depicting the Prophet Mohammad has spawned protests across Afghanistan. Demonstrations thus far have remained relatively small, but have grown increasingly violent over the past three days. Rock-throwing protestors caused minor property damage to international vehicles and GOA buildings on February 6. Six protestors were reportedly injured and one or two killed as police broke up the protests the same day. END SUMMARY.

#### February 4: Protestors Chant Anti-American Slogans

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[12.](#) (U) The first reports of protests came from Kunduz province in northern Afghanistan. On Saturday, February 4, prompted by mullahs from local Kunduz mosques, approximately 600 people converged on downtown Kunduz and protested the publication of cartoons negatively depicting the Prophet Mohammed for several hours. The protestors stated their purpose was to demonstrate against the publication of the anti-Muslim caricatures in Canadian, French and German newspapers; however, the crowd shouted slogans that were clearly anti-American: "Death to Americans," "Death to Jews," and "Death to the Danes." The demonstration dispersed peaceably and there was neither violence nor damage to any property in Kunduz. German-led PRT Kunduz also received reports that mullahs in the province's eastern city of Khanabad were encouraging demonstrations in that city.

#### February 5: Peaceful Demonstrations Broken Up

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[13.](#) (U) On Sunday, February 5, local mullahs incited a demonstration in Faizabad, capital of Badakhshan province in the northeast. Religious and community leaders drafted a message to UNAMA which protested against the Danish cartoons, called for the arrest of the person who drew the cartoon, and called upon President Karzai to sever relations with Denmark. This targeting of Denmark is significant as 42 Danish troops and a development advisor from the Danish development organization DANIDA are located at the Faizabad PRT.

[14.](#) (U) While this letter was being drafted, a peaceful protest with several hundred men occurred in the Old City of Faizabad. After approximately one hour, around 150 mostly young men splintered off from the main group and tried to cross into Faizabad's New City, where almost all international organizations are located. The local police fired many shots into the air and the crowd eventually dispersed. Nearly all of the international organizations based in Faizabad, including USAID contractors and implementing partners PADCO, IOM and Merlin, decided to temporarily move their expatriate staff to the PRT.

[16.](#) (U) In southeastern Afghanistan, one thousand people reportedly held a peaceful demonstration in Orgun, in Paktika Province, on February 5 to protest the Danish cartoons. The group burned a Danish flag but there were no other reports of violence. The protest lasted approximately an hour before local security forces dispersed the crowd without incident. The police and border patrol have increased patrols in the city to ensure continued calm.

[17.](#) (U) In eastern Afghanistan, there were two small demonstrations in Mehtarlam in Laghman Province on February 5. The two demonstrations -- each involving approximately fifty people -- were largely peaceful although the demonstrators reportedly set tires on fire, which the ANP quickly extinguished. Similarly,

press reports indicate around 1000 people protested in Jalalabad, demanding the withdrawal of Danish troops from the country, and that several hundred protesters gathered in Kandahar.

#### February 6: Protestors Injured in Takhar and Laghman

18. (U) Protests amplified on Monday, February 6. In Laghman province, press and local NGO reports indicate two people were injured and one was killed when police broke up continued protests there. Also on February 6, two small protests took place in Taloqan in Takhar province. Protestors threw rocks during the demonstration, breaking windows at the Governor's office. The police took firm control over the demonstration, firing shots to control the crowd. Several protesters were arrested, and four were sent to the hospital with injuries.

19. (U) In Kabul, a group of around 200 demonstrators threw rocks in the area of the British Embassy. The protest was dispersed by the police before it arrived at the Danish Embassy, but several cars driven by internationals were damaged.

#### GOA Response

10. (U) The Afghan government has addressed the issue of the offensive cartoons at the highest levels. President Karzai has already reacted to the cartoons, issuing a statement while visiting Denmark on January 29 that "any insult to the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is an insult to more than one billion Muslims and an act like this must never be allowed to be repeated." FM Abdullah issued a similar statement on February 5, and the members of the Afghan National Assembly discussed the issue briefly during debate on February 4.

#### International Response

11. (U) In response to the burning of their Embassy in Syria and further rumored protests in Kabul, the Norwegian Embassy in Kabul closed temporarily and moved its operations to the Norwegian ISAF compound. RC-East has contacted DACAAR, a Danish NGO with projects in the border area and around the country, to assist with their security planning. The DACAAR representative indicated that they withdrew their expatriate from Herat where they stated demonstrations were also taking place.

#### Comment

12. (SBU) Similar to the anti-American protests about the desecration of the Koran in May 2005, local mullahs have been the primary instigators of the protests. A notable difference, though, is that these protests have not led to the same degree of violence, in part because of the active intervention of the Afghan National Police. While ISAF (European-led) PRTs have expressed particular concern about these protests, demonstrations have taken place across the country, regardless of the presence of European forces in a province. Protests are expected to continue through the next few days. Post will continue to monitor the situation, including monitoring the Friday sermons in the mosques in Kabul and elsewhere. END COMMENT.

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